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And then we found out that the two camps who had the most problems with the bill were the most liberal and the most conservative? They were the ones who defeated it initially, until the Senate larded it up with enough goodies for the needed majority to clamber aboard the economy’s lifesaver.

But who backed this effort from the beginning? None other than budget hawk John Campbell, one of Washington’s most fiscally conservative representatives.

This summer we quarreled with Campbell’s principled stand on earmarks, saying he was going too far to apply his noble philosophy to fetching funding for dredging Upper Newport Bay. Not all earmarks are created equal, we argued. Your average politician would have fought for the earmark and bragged to constituents that he brought home the bacon. But not Campbell. We disagreed, but still admired his philosophical purity.

So we were surprised to see him back a bill no one really wanted. Rather, it was considered an emergency — like paying for your groceries with a credit card even though you know you might get laid off next week.

Campbell seemed to recognize the urgency. That part did not surprise us. He earned his bachelor’s degree in economics from UCLA and a master’s degree in business taxation from USC. He’s also a certified public accountant.

And nothing could have seemed more repellent to this self-professed Milton Friedman free-market capitalist than to have the government buy up junk in the hopes it could be sold later to pay back the taxpayer.

“I wouldn’t say that I or anyone else who voted for it is happy, but we are relieved,” Campbell said. “I think that this will go a long way toward stabilizing our markets, so that they begin to operate or function rationally again.”

Leading economists agreed our markets were headed for the proverbial iceberg. We’re proud to say that our Newport congressman showed strong leadership. He’ll have a tough time explaining his vote to his constituents, but sometimes a politician has to do that.

When your constituents don’t quite understand why a policy is necessary, then it’s up to their representative to explain it. We’re sure Campbell is up to the task.